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# STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.  
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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1. The first part of the paper is a list of the names of the persons who have been named in the paper. The names are arranged in alphabetical order. The names are as follows:

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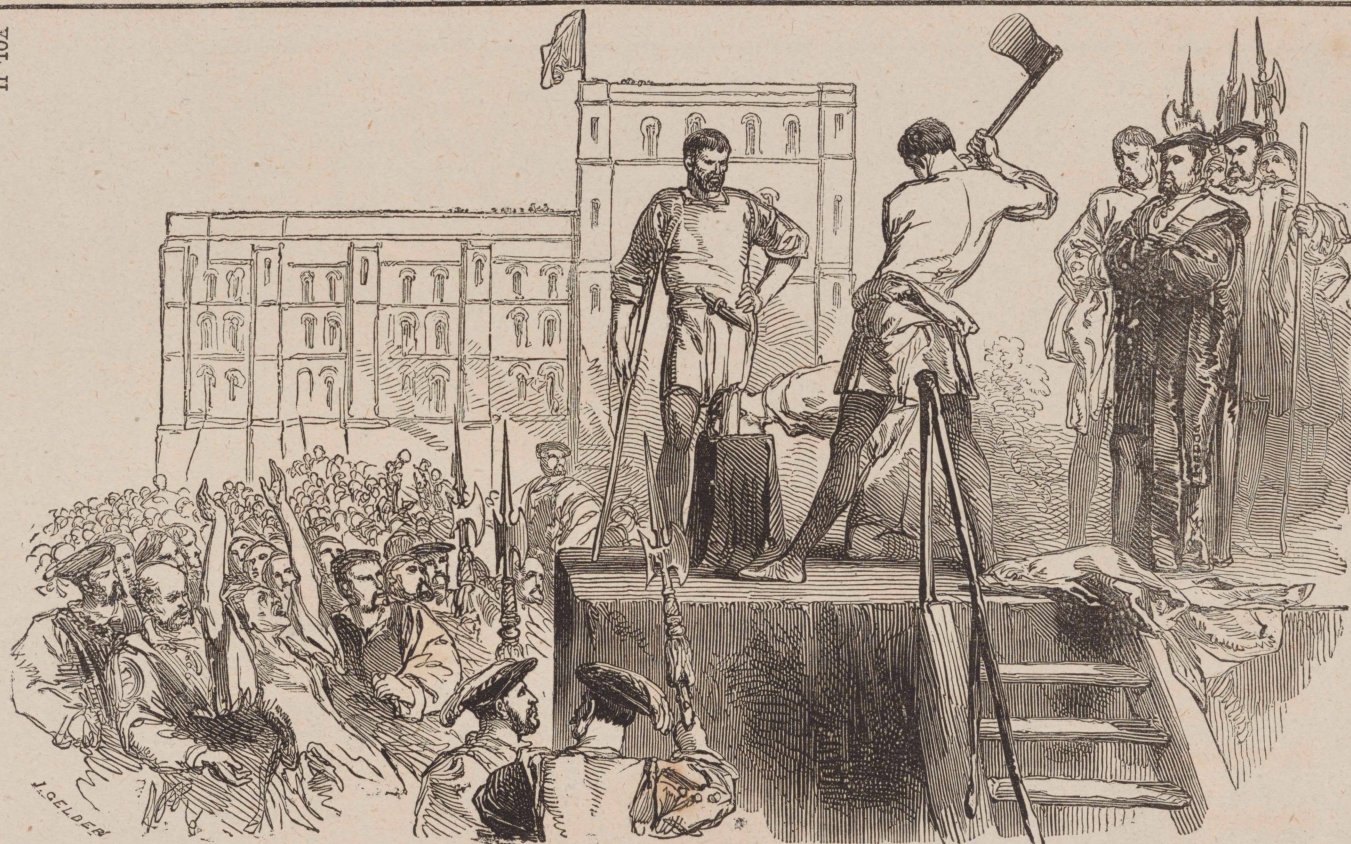
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2 1/2  
 1 1/2  
 2 1/2  
 3 1/2

and no other persons named



VOL. II.

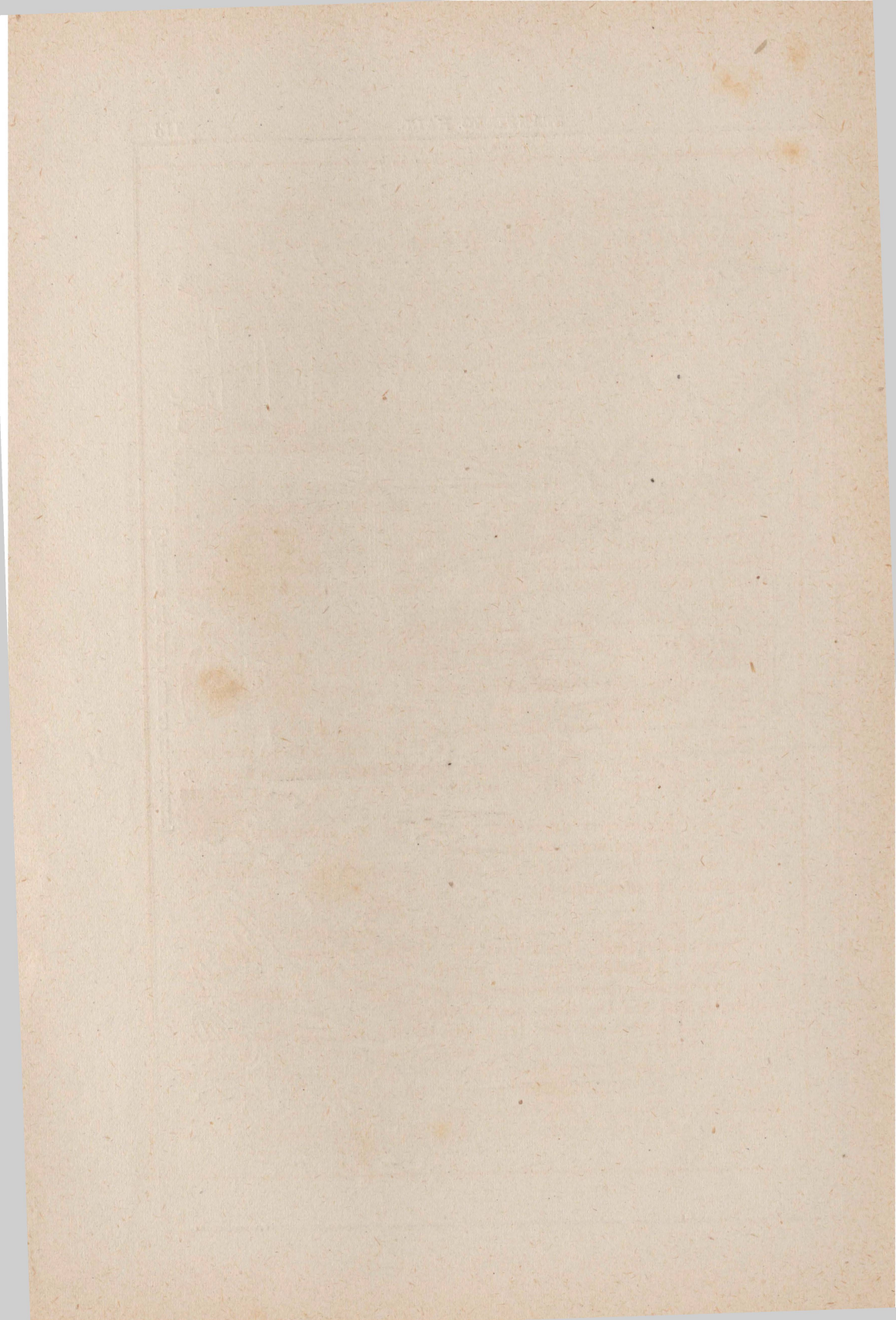


[EXECUTION OF SIR JOHN DE CORBEY.]

STANFIELD HALL.

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They respected also the presence of the dead, and the desolate mother who watched beside it. The fervent pressure of her lover's hand was more grateful to the rescued victim than a hundred gratulations.

"Come," said Wolsey, in a kind and serious voice, taking her by the hand, "this scene fits not a woman's presence; for the present, the convent's walls will be your best retreat—at least till you depart for London."

"For London!" answered the Lady Mary, with surprise; "and why not, my lord, for Stanfield?"

"For London," he repeated, gravely; "our gracious master remembers the debt of gratitude due to your ancient house, and the good queen intends to guard you near her person till a fitting marriage relieve her of your care."

The heiress sighed. The words "a fitting marriage" seemed a fresh barrier to her happiness. The churchman smiled, for he read the maiden's thought, and whispered a word, as he glanced at Walter, which brought the warm blood once more to her pale cheek, and reassured her heart. Both were deceived; trials which neither the cardinal nor the heiress dreamt of were in store for both.

"Farewell, my lords," said Wolsey, addressing the judges, who, with all present, rose on his departure. "I have performed my duty; you," he added, pointing to Sir John de Corbey and his accomplice, "doubtless will do yours. Let the trial commence at once, lest justice should accuse us of delay."

"Save me," whispered the knight to the leech, who watched the departure of the cardinal as coolly as if he were a mere spectator in the court, and not a criminal arraigned upon a charge touching his life; "is there no way to snatch me from dishonour and the grave?"

"None," laconically answered Adam, in the same under-tone; "the butcher's cur hath got firm hold."

"I would live," continued the wretched man—"live for repentance, for atonement."

"Pshaw!"

"Live," he iterated, "even in a cloister or a dungeon."

"What difference," demanded the Italian, "between them and the grave? I blush to call thee pupil. Dismiss these idle terrors from thy mind—feeble humanity's first and last weakness—and welcome, like me, thy long, eternal sleep."

About an hour after the departure of the cardinal the trial of Sir John de Corbey and his accomplice commenced. The first witness who appeared against them was Father Celestine, whom Walter, to his surprise, afterwards found had all the while travelled in Wolsey's train from London; but so secretly had his eminence taken his precautions, and such were the means at his



command, that to all but himself his presence had been unsuspected.

The good priest's deposition proved the arrival of the armourer in company with the prisoner on the night of his disappearance at the old mansion on the bank of the Thames; also, the sudden death of two of the servants the ensuing morning—men who were known to have been deep in the confidence of their master, and who had been present during the fatal interview in the chamber of the tower: which chamber, by Sir John's order, had been afterwards closed, and the household for years carefully kept from all admission to it. He afterwards related the arrival of the fugitive, and the circumstances which led to the discovery of the fatal recess during his concealment from Adam and his pursuers.

As soon as his evidence was completed, the leech, who all the while had eyed him with the glance of a basilisk, wrote a few hasty words upon a slip of paper, and gave it to one of the servants who had attended him and the knight to court. The fellow instantly disappeared with it. The colour of the witness slightly changed; he guessed the purport of the writing: he knew the thunderbolt was launched, but was prepared to meet it.

If the spectators had been appalled at the simple relation of the priest, their indignation was roused to the highest pitch by the eloquent description of Walter, who described with the energetic eloquence of youth the horrors of the victim's death—his distorted limbs, dislocated by his fearful despairing struggles in the living tomb to which his merciless destroyers had consigned him. A thrill of pity and terror ran through the veins of all; men listened with a silent fascination to the tale which charmed their senses and caused their blood to creep like the spell of the nightmare. The only sounds to be heard were the stifled convulsive sobs of the heart-broken widow of the victim.

"Merciless, merciless villains!" she exclaimed, "was it for this I bore him?—did Heaven permit me to become a parent only to lose him thus? Cuthbert, my boy, my martyred child!" she added, apostrophising the sad remains beside her, "would that the life-blood of thy mother could have saved thee from these butchers!"

Thrice did Sir John, when called on by the judges for his defence, rise and essay to speak. On every face he read his condemnation; every eye turned from his gaze with loathing and abhorrence. Confusion, and not remorse, overwhelmed him. The last time he sank upon his seat in sullen, hopeless despair. What could he urge against a tale so clear?—what plea advance to touch the heart of Justice?—what subtle lie, what plausible excuse avail him against the mute pleading of that lonely woman? Mourning like Eve over her murdered child, her very presence was his condemnation.



The Heaven he so long had braved with impunity confounded him at last.

At this moment the domestic whom Adam had despatched returned, and placed a sealed packet in the leech's hand, who hastily breaking the envelope, drew from it the book which Luther had written in reply to Henry's defence of the seven sacraments of the Church, and which our readers may remember he had found in the chamber of Father Celestine on the night of his visit to the house in London.

The jury, directly after the summing of the judges, returned a verdict of guilty against both.

When asked why sentence of death should not be pronounced, Adam alone replied: his voice was as low and musical as ever, and it was only from the bitter sarcasm which occasionally broke forth that men could perceive his heart of stone was moved.

"Were the question you have asked, my lords," he began, "other than one of those bitter mockeries in which humanity delights, I might, perhaps, dispute the right to punish one murder by another—the right for dust to judge its fellow dust—to wrest the high prerogative of Deity, by annihilating life, as if its hands had grown too feeble to uphold the balance. Such a plea, however, would serve me little here—it would be urged ages too soon. But a time will come when it must be heard; when mankind, starting like sleepers from a dream, will ask of earth's pale rulers and their laws, questions which kings and priests will find it hard to answer. Not yet," he added, "not yet—not yet!"

"Heretic!" exclaimed the presiding judge, in a tone of indignation.

"Your children's children," said Adam, with a smile, "perchance may call me by another name."

"And that is——"

"Philosopher."

"Philosopher!" iterated the legist, with a look of scorn—"what school?"

"Of one which yet hath known few pupils and still less admirers," replied the leech, unmoved by the expression of contempt—"of one whose lessons, like the lines traced by the eternal wave upon the rock, imprinted once, become indelible; men even now begin to mark its letters, and soon will learn to read them."

"Perish such doctrines!" said another of the judges; "they pervert mankind."

"Thought cannot perish," mildly answered the Italian. "You may destroy the temple in your blind madness," he added, at the same time slightly touching his brow; "but the god defies your feeble malice; a truth once uttered is immortal, and cannot be



destroyed ; like an event, it slumbers cradled on the wing of time, sure to arrive at last."

"Cursed follower of Luther!"

"Of Luther!" interrupted Adam; "of him who broke one chain to forge mankind another—of the beer-swilling German, whose dull eyes mistook truth's shadow for its substance? No; he dreams as little of my school as thou dost. Of Luther!" he repeated. "To prove that our affinities approach no nearer than our common dust, I'll yield another victim to the list of those who suffer through his errors."

The book, the mere possession of which was looked upon by the vindictive Henry and his ministers as a species of treason and sacrilege, was handed by the prisoner to one of the ushers, who gave it to the judge. The man of law piously crossed himself as he read the title. Unfortunately, it contained within its leaves the letter which the brother of the unfortunate Celestine had written to him from Germany when he forwarded the fatal volume, and the poor priest was instantly arrested. He submitted with a sigh of resignation, for he knew that his doom was fixed, and sought not by useless struggles to avert it.

"Monster!" said Walter to the Italian; "crimes enough hadst thou upon thy soul already!"

After a short consultation amongst the judges, the presiding one pronounced the sentence on the prisoners. Sir John de Corbey, in consideration of his rank, was doomed to perish by the axe; but for the heretic, as well as murderer, Adam, a more fearful punishment was assigned—the stake; his body to be consumed to ashes, and those ashes given to the winds. The old man heard the sentence with a bitter smile.

Father Celestine was to be removed to London, to answer in the court established by Archbishop Warham for the punishment of heresy, for his imputed crime.

Despite his entreaties and the influence of Wolsey's name, which Walter scrupled not to use, he was refused permission even to shake his old friend by the hand, or whisper one word of consolation. In the impetuous indignation of his heart he would yet further have committed himself, had not his friend the jester, who had been an interested spectator of the trial, succeeded in dragging him away.

"By my faith," said Patch, as soon as they had cleared the court-house, and were alone upon the plain which surrounds the castle, "but my search is ended. I have for a long time been looking for a successor to my office, and at last have found one. Come with me," he continued, "that with all due ceremony and celerity I may resign the ensigns of my authority in your favour."

"Spare me!" said the young man, painfully agitated; "I pray you, spare me! The good priest was the friend of my otherwise



unfriended youth—my tutor—guide—my second father—and for me he dies ! Had I not sought the shelter of his quiet home, had not his fears for me disarmed all prudence, yon fiend's relentless malice had been baulked."

By this time the speakers had reached the second moat, some traces of which, twenty years since, were plainly visible, but they have since been filled up and built over ; at the period of which we write it was a deep dry ditch, with steep banks on either side. They both naturally paused upon the brink.

"I think," said the jester, "that, as the world wags, thou hast some liking for me—a sort of kind caprice—something like the love, born half of pity, half endurance."

"Have I not proved thy worth ?" demanded his companion, grasping him warmly by the hand. "Be more just to thyself, and call the feeling by its true name—friendship."

"Friendship be it then," said Patch ; "the name will serve as well as any other. Supposing, now, that I should fall in this same moat before us, what would this friendship prompt thee to do ?"

"Why, help thee out again," answered Walter, with a faint smile.

"How ?" demanded the querist ; "by jumping in thyself, or remaining on the bank, whence thou couldst reach a helping hand to drag me safe again ?"

"Certes, by remaining on the bank," replied the young man, who did not yet perceive the drift of the jester's questions, which our readers, doubtless, have already divined.

"Good," said Patch ; "time will bring something more than a beard upon thy chin. Celestine is in the ditch, where but for me thou wouldst have jumped beside him, instead of standing on the bank to aid him. There's nothing," he added, "so useful as an illustration to a truth ; 'tis like a picture in a primer—it shows the child its lesson."

"Kindly and wisely hast thou shown me mine," exclaimed his hearer, who saw at once, not only the necessity, but the wisdom, of his friend's advice, so characteristically conveyed. "In my folly, I would neglect the only means to save him. I must to Wolsey ; one word from him——"

"That word will never be spoken," interrupted the jester. "Alas ! poor dreamer, how little dost thou know the world ! To hear thee speak, one would imagine it a simple path—straight as integrity, and not a winding maze, which none may traverse without its subtle clue. Had the good priest," he added, "but simply broke his vows, our master might have cast the shadow of the Roman purple o'er him—winked at treason—shut his eyes at murder—turned a deaf ear to any accusation, save that which touches Henry's vanity. Celestine hath wounded that, and Mercy's voice is dumb."



"Surely his grace's influence with the king," urged Walter unwilling to abandon his last hope.

"Whew!" whistled Patch. "I thought the child could read, and find it only knows its letters. Didst ever ask thyself this simple question: Why the child loves its paper kite—the air-buoyed toy, whose flight resembles so well ambition's short career?"

"Even for its buoyant qualities," replied his companion.

"Because *he holds the string*," continued the speaker, with a glance of deep meaning, "and knows he can recall it at his pleasure."

"What if the string should break?"

"The kite falls still the same," drily answered the jester.

This familiar illustration at once revealed to the young man the relative positions of the minister and his master; the former was all-powerful alone so long as his views crossed not Henry's inclinations, whose pride was flattered by the homage paid his servant, and who saw in him, as in a glass, his own reflected greatness. When he considered the character of the monarch, and the crime of Celestine, he felt hopeless alike of Wolsey's mediation or the sovereign's mercy.

It must be remembered that, during the lifetime of Arthur Prince of Wales, Henry VII., according to some historians, designed his second son for the archbishopric of Canterbury, and educated him accordingly. His preceptor Skelton sought to make him rather a scholar than an enlightened statesman. He tutored him in the dry philosophy of the schools, especially the Aristotelian, then most in credit with the learned. To theological studies the royal pupil, in early life, devoted himself with ardour and success; but their good effect on the character of the future king may be questioned. Divinity, as it was at that period taught in the schools, tended little to enlarge the views or give soundness to the opinions of its students; and hence, probably, the violent prejudices of Henry—his conceit and intemperance in polemical discussions—his vacillations on important points, and his obstinacy in those of less moment. He was never known to forgive any man who either differed in opinion or had once offended him; and when, at a more advanced period of the Reformation, Luther sought, by the most abject flattery, to conciliate the royal reformer, he found his advances treated with disdain.

It was, hopeless, therefore, to expect that any who knew the monarch, or valued his favour, would venture to intercede for one who had so deeply offended him where he was most sensitive.

"My hope ends here!" exclaimed Walter, sadly, as he pondered these things in his mind. "Where shall I look for aid—where trust?"

"Trust much to thyself," said Patch, "and something, perhaps, to me. Folly succeeds where wit will often fail."



"Folly!" repeated the young man, earnestly. "By my faith, thou hast mistaken thine office; thou wert born to be a statesman, not a jester."

"Are they, then, so much unlike?" demanded his companion. "For my poor part, I see this difference in them—the jester's office is a merry, whilst the statesman's is a sad one; and when I think on't, I prefer my own—kings smile at mine, while nations weep at his."

There was a touch of sadness in the motley-wearer's tone which showed that Walter was in the right. The jester had, indeed, mistaken his calling, or perchance the world had done so for him.

It was finally arranged that our hero should take no step in the matter without the counsel of his friend, whose shrewdness equalled his devotion. There were but few men in the world before whom Patch condescended to unmask, and when he did so, his confidence was complete. Ardently did the youth desire his return to London, where alone his efforts could be of use. Gratitude, to his uncorrupted heart, was a sacred debt; and, like an honest mind, he felt impatient till he had discharged it.

On parting with Patch, the impatient secretary hastened to the convent to which the heiress of Stanfield had been conveyed, on her liberation from prison, by order of the cardinal. We trust that but few of our readers are too old or too hackneyed in the mysteries of the heart not to feel the joy of such a meeting—its smiles and tears—its hopes renewed—its quiet, deep content, more eloquent in silence than in words. Those who have seen the being in whom their heart hath centred restored to them at life's last gasp—the shipwrecked mariner who, with but one plank between him and destruction, when the dark waters roared around him, and his reeling brain was drunk with terror, caught the rope cast by some friendly hand to save him—can well imagine the change the lovers felt from dark despair to hope's returning dawn. Even the veiled sister who, in accordance with conventual rule, was present at the interview, let fall a tear in witness of her sympathy. Though divorced from earth, and dead to human passion, the poor nun was not insensible to human joy. Perhaps she remembered, too, the time when such feelings and such hopes were not quite a stranger to her breast.

"Farewell!" exclaimed Walter reluctantly. "You will soon change this calm retreat for the allurements of a court. Do not forget me then! Why," he added, "why was I not born a prince, or you a beggar? Why hath fate placed this cruel distance 'twixt us?"

"Unkind one," said the orphan, with a smile, "why see a distance which my eyes regard not?"

With this gentle reproof the Lady Mary went to the retirement of her cell, there to give thanks to Heaven for her preservation



from her guardian's tyranny, and offer prayers for the repose of the generous, gallant Henry de Corbey's soul ; Walter to his attendance upon his patron, Wolsey.

Our hero's first act, on his arrival at the palace of the Duke of Norfolk, was to throw himself at the feet of the cardinal, and thank him for his generous protection of the orphan heiress—a protection which our readers may remember was not extended without some danger to himself.

During the stay at Bury St. Edmund's, and his eminence's supposed retreat at the martyr's shrine, Patch alone suspected his absence : he knew his master's humour. Hence the jester's positive assurance that the mendicant friar would be found upon the trial when Walter informed him of Wolsey's promise. 'Tis strange how well he knew the churchman.

"Rise," said his eminence, graciously extending his hand to the kneeling youth ; "I have but performed my duty ; although, perchance," he added, with a complacent smile, at the recollection of the coolness and courage he had shown, "it was somewhat boldly done."

"Say nobly, my good lord !" exclaimed the young man ; "let not the tongue whose praise is fame to all beside be unjust to yourself alone."

"Hast learned to flatter ?" demanded Wolsey. "Thou wilt thrive at court, where a smooth tongue maketh way better than a sharp wit. Tell me," he added, "what followed after I left the court ?"

"The assassins were condemned."

"Of course," said Wolsey, coolly ; "did they think Justice was lame as well as blind, and that her silent step would never overtake them ? That widowed mother's curse," he added, "must haunt them to the scaffold—ring in their ears even at the death stroke ; mine echo with it still. Proceed."

Encouraged by the familiar tone of the speaker, Walter related the last triumphant act of the Italian's malice, and Father Celestine's arrest. His hearer's brow darkened as he proceeded.

"Madman !" muttered his eminence to himself, "to mix with matters of such fearful moment ! Better to have sat on the volcano's brow than brave the wrath of Henry ! But speak of him no more ; his fate is sealed beyond all human aid—all human hope."

"Alas, my lord !" said Walter, mournfully, "he is my friend—the protector of my youth. Can I be silent, and his dear life in danger ? Grant me the means to save him."

"Impossible !" said Wolsey, coldly ; "I can do all but step between the lion and his prey. Walter," he added, kindly, seeing that the young man turned from him with a sad, despairing look, "I would do much for thee. Men call me heartless where I am



only powerless. Meddle not thou in this high matter; it would but bring destruction on thy head—not save thy friend one pang. For thy dead father's sake, I fain would guide thy sea-tossed bark to shore—not see it wrecked upon a rock like this."

With these words the speaker retired to his private chamber, where, without special invitation, none might presume to follow him.

"Patch was right," thought the young man to himself; "the fool hath judged the world more wisely than the scholar. I must rely upon myself to save him."

The three days allotted between the sentence and the execution of Sir John de Corbey had at last expired. The scaffold for the knight was erected close to the keep of Norwich Castle—the stake for his accomplice between the inner and the outward moats. Attracted by the fearful spectacle, the city at an early hour poured forth its population. Gentry and citizens alike were there, the unwashed artisan, the hooded friar, the prowling mendicant, and lively soldier, all drawn together by the excitement of the scene. To the honour of the sex, but few of the wives and daughters of the spectators were present, and those only of the lowest grade.

In consideration of the rank of the principal culprit, both he and his minister were confined in a strong chamber in Bigod's tower, less dreary than the gloomy cells where prisoners were generally kept. The rudely sculptured crucifix and massive chain sealed in the wall marked the past and present use to which it had been and was applied—first a chapel, now a prison. The physiognomy of the captives presented a singular picture of the two extremes of human passion,—its tempest and its calm. Sir John, agonised with shame at the approach of an ignominious death, his heart seared by disappointed ambition, raged in his wild despair like some fierce tiger caught in the hunter's snare; whilst the philosophic Adam, on the contrary, was as unmoved at the prospect of his fearful death as the Indian fanatic whose own hand lights the pile which wafts him to the stars. The knight, faithful to the infidelity which he doubted, but professed, had obstinately refused all religious aid, and driven its horror-stricken minister from his dungeon by his imprecations and his blasphemies. Adam, on the contrary, had contented himself by quietly declining it.

"I will not die!" exclaimed the frantic noble, pacing the narrow limits of his cell; "I will not meet the gaze of the vile mob, or hear their insulting yell. If the fable which gulls mankind be true—if there be a devil—I call on him to save me. I dare not die," he added, with increased terror; "life in a dungeon, where the foul toad or knotted snake engenders—anything rather than annihilation."

His companion listened to him with a complacent smile.

"Adam," continued the guilty wretch, "recall the priest. What



if his tale be true? What if there be a God—just and terrible, the avenger of blood, the judge stern and implacable, the reader of all hearts? Call him again—'tis not too late, perchance, for penitence; for, oh! I fear there is a state worse than annihilation.”

“There is,” said Adam, coldly.

“You tell me so! You, who so oft have mocked at——”

“Priestcraft,” interrupted the Italian, “not at Deity. Fool! the flower, the tender blade of grass thy impious foot so oft hath crushed proclaim the holy truth. There is a God—the judge and the avenger. Passion’s clouds may veil Him from our gaze, the mists of sophistry obscure the eye of reason, but His all-glorious presence is not less reflected back from nature as a mirror.”

“Call back the priest!” shrieked his astonished master to the leech, in a voice of frenzy; “’tis not too late to pray—to make atonement. Oh! for a year, a month, a week—one little week of life—for penitence and prayer!”

“Too late!” exclaimed Adam, pointing to the door of the cell; “when next it opens, the executioner will withdraw the bolt; the hour for prayer or penitence is past.”

“Then I am lost.”

“Here and hereafter lost,” solemnly repeated his fellow-prisoner.

“You tell me so,” said the unhappy man, glaring on him with the mingled rage of insanity and despair; “you, who have been my minister in crime!—you, who played with human life as with a childish toy!—you, who more than once have steeled my heart and urged me to perdition!”

“Ay,” said Adam, “I have lured thee to destruction’s brink, and joyed to see thee damning thyself with crime.”

“For what?” demanded the knight, in a voice of surprise.

“For vengeance.”

“What cause?”

“What cause?” iterated the wily Italian, drawing up his figure to its full height, and regarding his master with a look of withering hate; “what cause? Hast thou forgot the maid whose home was by old Arno’s palaced shores—my affianced bride? Pure as the first thought of a young angel’s heart, I left her to prepare our future home of love; returning, found her all thy degrading lust and brutal violence could make her. From that hour I cast off human ties and bound myself to vengeance. I have achieved it. Earth,” he added, slowly, “and I are quits.”

“My sin—my sin hath found me!” murmured Sir John, in a hopeless tone; the leech’s impassioned words recalling to his memory the first deed of blood and violence with which he had stained his soul.

“Hope not for pardon; dream not of it,” continued Adam; “thy victim’s form will glide between thee and the mercy-seat—



her plea for justice deaden the frantic cry of thy despair. The avenging Judge holds forth the balance in His red right hand ; it sinks—it falls—the measure of thy crime is full. Rejoicing fiends already circle round thee, waiting the headsman's stroke to seize their prey ! ”

“ Mercy ! ” said the assassin, falling on his knees, overcome with terror ; “ mercy ! mercy ! ”

“ Mercy ! ” repeated the Italian ; “ think on thy crimes.”

“ I do repent them.”

“ Thy kinsman's blood,” he continued.

“ May be forgiven.”

“ The armourer's living death—his widowed mother's curse.”

“ Heaven is merciful.”

“ Thy son—thy murdered son,” added his tormentor, in the tone of an exulting fiend.

“ Shall be avenged ! ” shrieked the frantic knight, starting to his feet, and seizing the leech by the neck with a grasp of iron. “ Thou croaking raven, I will stop thy cry ! Triumphant devil, I'll disappoint thee yet ! Thou shalt not drive hope's pitying angel from my side ! Be this,” he added, as he dashed his victim with a giant's strength against the wall of the prison, “ my first atonement ! Ah,” he continued, as the convulsed features, bursting eye-balls, and blood-stained foam which bubbled from the Italian's lips, proclaimed the struggle nearly over, “ thou art human ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! I shall escape thee yet ! Writhe on, serpent, writhe on ; thy sting is powerless now ! ”

With these words he gradually relaxed his grasp, and the corpse of the once-gifted Adam fell at his feet. In the triumph of his mad revenge, the wretched man little thought that he had but fulfilled the intentions of the dead man, who had purposely provoked him to the deed, in order to escape the stake and executioner.

His prediction to the knight proved true. The first who unbarred the cell, in which the fearful scene we have described took place, was the executioner.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Death is indeed most terrible ; e'en when it comes  
Unto the sinless couch, and weeping friends  
Whisper religion's last consoling prayer.  
But on the scaffold, amid the rabble's curse,  
When conscience echoes back the accusing cry,  
It comes with tenfold terror.—CREON.

In the foremost rank of spectators nearest the fatal scaffold were our old friend Steadman and his maniac sister Maud. Vainly had the honest woolcomber, together with Walter and many of her friends, tried to dissuade her from the fearful spectacle. To all



entreaties she opposed but one reply, "That justice would be defeated, and the murderer of her boy, on account of his vast wealth and ancient name, be permitted to escape the punishment due to his crimes."

"I will be present!" she exclaimed; "I will behold the death-pang of the tiger who hath robbed me of my child, and curse him as he dies. I know—I know," she muttered sullenly, "you would break the snare, and set the monster free—free him for gold—for his accursed gold—as if this earth coined in one yellow heap should buy my poor son's blood—no—no!"

"One—two—three!" she cried with frantic delight, as she counted the strokes of the great bell of the cathedral, which announced the hour appointed for the consummation of the last solemn act of justice—"he comes!—ha! ha! ha!—he comes; You will not let them disappoint me," she added, turning to the people; "you will not let them save him. If they attempt it, pluck him from the scaffold; tear him limb from limb; show him the poor man's blood is not to be purchased by the rich man's coin."

"Shame!" exclaimed her brother, angrily; "as thou art a Christian woman, peace. Heed her not, friends," he continued, turning to the mob—"she is mad; she is the mother of the murdered boy, whom Sir John——"

"Buried alive!" shrieked Maud—"consigned in the full bloom of health, while the young blood ran freely in his veins, giving fresh impulse to his generous heart, to a living tomb, to gnaw his flesh with hunger—tear his poor veins to quench his burning thirst—to madness—frenzy—to such dark despair that death became a mercy. Who that hath a mother," she continued, looking wildly round, "will dare dispute my right to curse him?"

The great gates of the castle were thrown open, and the procession appeared at last before the impatient multitude. First came the sheriffs in their robes, with their wands of office; they were followed by some half dozen soldiers of the city guard, who carried their long partisans upon their shoulders. The next was the executioner, a tall, brawny, muscular man, whose features were rigid with the hard lines of iron resolution—coldly rigid, as if the repeated horrors he had witnessed had had the same effect upon them as Medusa's head—transformed them into stone. In his right hand he bore the axe, with its recently sharpened glittering edge turned towards the prisoner. The fellow, for the greater ease in the performance of his disgusting office, was naked to the waist; there was nothing to impede the action of his strong arms, the corded sinews of which were as visible to the spectators as the stems of the withered leafless ivy are, left clinging round the branches of some blasted oak.

A thrill of horror ran through the crowd at the sight of the law's



last terrible avenger, and a stifled murmur of execration followed his appearance.

On the appearance of Sir John de Corbey, who was led, or rather half-dragged, between two of the headsman's assistants, the indignant populace broke out into a loud triumphant yell, for the haughty knight had never been a favourite amongst them, and the nature of his crime was such as steeled all hearts against him. From his torn doublet and flushed features, it was evident his conductors had had a desperate struggle before they had pinioned him; nor will it be wondered at when it is remembered that when they entered his cell they found him almost mad, gloating over the dead body of his victim and accomplice, Adam.

The sheriffs, who were responsible for the conducting of the execution, trembled at the effect which the expression of popular opinion might have upon the prisoner. To their astonishment, however, instead of increasing his excitement, it rendered him quite calm—the noble survived the man in him. With a violent effort at self-control, he repressed his agitation, and walked quietly to the block, where the principal executioner was already occupied in arranging cords to drag him down in the event of his resisting.

"Spare thy trouble, fellow," he said; "the madness of the hour is past. I might contend with death, but not with thee. Are there any," he added, "who for the love of the ancient house of Corbey will do a dying man a last poor favour?"

One of the soldiers who followed the sheriffs advanced towards him: he had served him in the wars.

"Thanks, good fellow," said the knight. "Remove my doublet, and place the bandage so around my eyes as to confine my hair; then lead me to the block. I can endure yon wretch's axe, but not his hand."

The two functionaries motioned to the soldier to comply with the prisoner's request, for they were anxious to end the scene. Once, and once only, the unhappy man was observed to tremble and his cheek turn pale. It was when the voice of the maniac Maud fell upon his ear, as they were blindfolding him, before leading him to the block.

"There is a God," she cried; "monster, thou feel'st Him now. His hand hath struck thee—die, like the ban wolf, howling, unpitied—scorned and despised of earth—hopeless of heaven!—die!" she shrieked, with frantic exultation, as the executioner swung the glittering axe in a semicircle round his head to give greater impetus to the blow, "accursed of God and man—despairing die!"

The axe fell, and the soul of Sir John de Corbey, ere the echo of the blow had faded on the ears of the terror-stricken spectators, stood before the tribunal of the Most High. Man's judgment may not pursue it further.



"It is accomplished," said the widow, all passion and excitement suddenly leaving her; "my boy's blood hath not fallen to earth unavenged. Lead me home," she added, turning to her brother, and half-sinking into his arms—"lead me home, for every minute of my life is numbered."

The leech proved right in both his predictions—her senses were restored and she was dying.

"Maud!" exclaimed her brother, the tears streaming down his weather-beaten cheeks, "thou art dying. Go not to the grave with curses on thy lips. Remember His words, who preaches pardon, that we may be pardoned. As thou dost hope to meet thy boy in heaven, recall thy maledictions on the dead."

The expiring woman opened her half-closed eyes, and cast a look of hatred towards the scaffold and its still palpitating victim—a look such as the wounded pantheress might regard the destroyer of her young with. It was the last she ever gave on earth; the sorrows and triumph of the heart-broken mother of the armourer in this world were over. The sympathising crowd slowly divided for Steadman and his friends, as they bore the body of his sister from the scene.

Walter was joined by Wolsey in the commission to the sheriffs, authorising them to take possession of the property of Sir John de Corbey, now confiscated to the king and seized on for his use. Patch, whose keen restless disposition rendered him unhappy unless when occupied, thought proper to accompany him; for, as he judiciously remarked, there were occasions on which two heads had the advantage over one, and this promised to be one of them. While the officials were occupied in taking an inventory of the plate and furniture, the jester demanded to be shown to the apartment of Adam.

"What think'st to find there?" demanded his companion.

"The key to a riddle which hath puzzled me," replied Patch, "the leech's character. For a fool, I act on philosophic principles. Naturalists tell us, if we would gain a knowledge of an animal, its habits, manners, and propensities, to examine well its den. Adam's the animal I would study; I'd gain a knowledge of his habits, manners, and propensities; his room the den I would examine."

The door of the apartment was locked—it had been fastened by its occupant on the morning of the trial; they were compelled, therefore to break it open, for the key was nowhere to be found. It was one of those large old-fashioned rooms, full of quaint nooks and convenient corners, such as are still occasionally to be found in country mansions. The furniture resembled more the odds and ends of an artist's studio than the garniture of a well-ordered chamber. Cabinets, no two of which were alike, were stuck in the different recesses. On one side of the walls was a collection







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